

News Briefs

CF Infrastructure Toolkit Available

We just loaded a new resource on our web site that can help guide organizations and community leaders better understand the complex process that is required to successfully develop and construct a new facility.

We are calling it the **Community Facilities Infrastructure Toolkit** and it outlines the major capacity, credit, and logistical challenges that particularly confront America's small towns and rural areas.

The Community Facilities Infrastructure Toolkit is designed to apply broadly across organizations regardless of project type or finance sources—including conventional bank loans, bond financing, or state and federal grant and lending programs.

USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities programs particularly applies to the types of projects discussed in the Toolkit, which provides useful recommendations for rural communities seeking financial support from USDA Rural Development.

The Community Facilities programs apply a public-private partnership model consisting of the private community organization, private lender, and the USDA to catalyze rural development throughout the country. The programs provide direct loans and loan guarantees to numerous projects in several categories: healthcare, public facilities, community support, public safety, educational services, utility services, and food systems. Rural communities with populations under 20,000 are eligible for the program.

For more information visit the web at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/wa>.

Washington State

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More Opportunities For Improving Broadband

There continues to be a national interest in improving broadband in order to afford the same access opportunities that level the playing field for broadband accessibility.



State Director
Mario Villanueva

We are reminding readers that the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant applications are due March 14 (see page 2 for contact information). The DLT program is specifically designed to assist rural communities in acquiring distance learning and telemedical technologies so that local teachers, and medical service providers who serve rural residents can link to other teachers, medical professionals, and other needed expertise located at distances too far to access otherwise.

Also, last month we announced our **Cool & Connected site**, which is a pilot program sponsored by USDA's Rural Utilities Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Sustainable Communities. The program has the potential to help community members develop strategies and an action plan for using planned or existing broadband service to promote smart, sustainable community development. This

is a great opportunity for a small-town to receive technical assistance for revitalizing small town main streets by using planned or existing broadband service. As we know, quality broadband access can provide new opportunities for people and businesses.

Finally, we wanted to bring to your attention a regional broadband summit that will be held in Seattle later this month. Sponsored by a number of groups, the summit will feature high-impact discussions focused on everything from how to bring advanced telecommunications infrastructure to rural communities, to how to ensure that all Americans have the broadband access and critical skills needed to thrive in today's digital economy.

See more details in the story at the bottom of the page. This is another great opportunity to join the conversation about quality broadband access for all.

Sincerely,

Mario Villanueva
Washington State Director

Digital Northwest: A Summit for Regional Broadband Leaders

Please join local and federal policy makers from across the Northwest region for a Broadband Summit in Seattle, Wash., on March 20 - 21, hosted by Next Century Cities and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NITA)

Broadband is emerging as a critical driver of economic growth and prosperity across the country. The "Digital Northwest" broadband summit will bring together state, local and federal officials, industry representatives, community leaders and other key stakeholders to share real-world broadband success stories and lessons learned from across the region.

The summit will also examine the gaps that remain and strategize on what still needs to be done to expand access to and adoption of

high-speed Internet services for the benefit of all citizens.

A Welcome Reception will be held the evening of Sunday, March 20 at the World Trade Center Seattle, followed by a day-long Summit on Monday, March 21 at the Bell Harbor International Conference Center.

Registration is **FREE**. Rooms are being held at the Seattle Marriott Waterfront for a deeply discounted rate of \$169/night. Make your reservation here by next Monday (March 7) to receive the discount.

For more information, please email Joelle Tessler at jtessler@ntia.doc.gov.

Guaranteed Rural Housing Program

USDA Rural Development offers home loan guarantees where the government backs a portion of a home loan through an approved lender as opposed to direct loans, where the government directly funds the borrower.

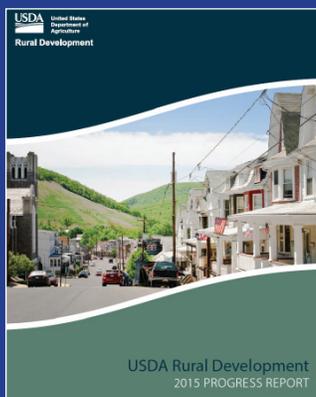
This program assists approved lenders in providing low- and moderate-income households the opportunity to own adequate, modest, decent, safe and sanitary dwellings as their primary residence in eligible rural areas.

Eligible applicants may build, rehabilitate, improve or relocate a dwelling in an eligible rural area.

The program provides a 90% loan note guarantee to approved lenders in order to reduce the risk of extending 100% loans to eligible rural homebuyers.

Guaranteed Housing Loans are subject to the credit and income requirements of both the lender and the USDA. All applicants must present a decent credit history, demonstrating the ability to pay mortgage, including taxes and insurance, on time each month.

For more information, contact your local USDA Rural Development office or visit the web at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/wa>.



Native American Tribes Can Apply for Business Development Grant

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications from Native American tribes for the Rural Business Development Grant Program (RBDG), which is a competitive grant program designed to develop and expand rural small and emerging private business enterprises.

Applications from Native American tribes must be sent by March 31, 2016.

Grant funds may be used for targeted technical assistance, training and other activities to support the development of small, private business enterprises in rural areas.

For a tribe to apply to assist a tribal business enterprise, the governing board must be independent from the tribal government.

All applications must be sent to the

USDA Rural Development Washington State Office, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite B, Olympia, WA 98512, and must be received in the office by 4:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time.,

For more information on the RBDG, please contact Carlotta Donisi by calling (360) 704-7724 or email her at carlotta.donisi@wa.usda.gov.

USDA Seeks Applications for Farm Labor Housing Loan/Grant Program

USDA Rural Development is soliciting applications for Section 514 Farm Labor Housing (FLH) loans and Section 516 FLH grants for the construction of new off-farm FLH units and related facilities for domestic farm laborers and for the purchase and substantial rehabilitation of an existing non-FLH property.

This program assists qualified applicants who cannot obtain commercial credit on terms that will allow them to charge rents that are affordable to low-income tenants. Borrowers must have sufficient qualifications and experience to develop and operate the project.

Qualified applicants include farmers, associations of farmers and family farm corporations; associations of farmworkers and nonprofit organizations; most state and local government entities, and federally-recognized tribes.

Funding may be used for construction, improvement, repair and purchase of

housing for domestic farm laborers in both urban or rural areas.

Funding may also be available for related activities including buying and improving land; purchasing household furnishings, and paying construction loan interest.

Domestic farm laborers, including those working on fish and oyster farms and on-farm processing; retired and/or disabled farm laborers may live in FLH Housing; however, they must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident with very-low to moderate household income who receives a portion of his/her income from farm labor employment. This definition may include the immediate family members residing with such a person.

Very-low to moderate-income: Very-low income is below 50% of area median income; low-income is 50-80% of area median income; moderate income is capped at \$5,500 above low-income limit.

Low interest loans and grants based on need are available that do not exceed 90 percent of the project cost. Loans are made up to 33 year payback period with a 1 percent fixed rate.

An allocation of loan funds is also available for on-farm labor housing and is funded on a first-come, first-served basis.

A two-phase application process starts with pre-applications accepted on an annual basis through a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) in the Federal Register. Selected pre-applications are invited to submit final applications

The deadline for receipt of all applications in response to this Notice is 5:00 p.m. on April 12, 2016.

Washington State Applicants should contact Mary Traxler at the USDA Rural Development's Washington State Office in Olympia by calling 360,704,7725 or email her at mary.traxler@wa.usda.gov.

DLT Grant Application Deadline Approaching

USDA Rural Development is soliciting applications for Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grants for FY 2016. Applications are due March 14, 2016.

Minimum grant amount is \$50,000 and \$500,000 maximum for eligible applicants. The grants are awarded through a competitive process and may be used to fund telecommunications-enabled equipment and related advanced technologies which extend educational and medical applications into rural areas.

For more information about the pro-

gram, please go to the web at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants>

Details on how to apply can be found online at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants> and on page 1388 of the Jan. 12, 2016 Federal Register.

If you want to speak to a representative, please contact Joe Bradley by email at joe.bradley@wdc.usda.gov or call him at 208-401-8090 (Mountain Time).



Visit us on the web at www.rd.usda.gov/wa